

All Reasons are Fundamentally for Attitudes

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1. Introduction

As rational agents, we are governed by reasons. The fact that there's beer at the pub might be a reason to go there and a reason to believe you'll enjoy it. Facts reported on the news might be reasons to believe there is suffering in a war zone and to donate to charity. Specifically, these are *normative* reasons - considerations that rationally support responses we can give in light of them. They must be distinguished from motivating reasons: reasons for which, or considerations in light of which, we respond. Motivating reasons can be normative reasons, but they needn't be: the reasons for which we think or do things may not really support those responses. Hereafter by 'reasons' we mean normative reasons unless indicated.

As the above examples illustrate, there are reasons for both action and belief. But although much work on reasons focuses primarily on action and belief, there are many other responses for which there seem to be reasons. In particular, many attitudes besides belief – for example, desire, regret, admiration, contempt, fear, gratitude, and blame – seem subject to reasons. This diversity raises questions about how reasons for different responses relate to each other. Might certain such reasons be more fundamental than others? Should certain reasons and not others be treated as paradigmatic?

Often, reasons for action are at least implicitly treated as the fundamental or paradigmatic case. This can be seen, for example, in the tendency of philosophers to find it puzzling that reasons for attitudes seem not to satisfy certain conditions on reasons for action. For example, it is plausible that there is a reason to act in some way only if acting in that way is under your voluntary control. But attitudes are rarely, perhaps never, under our voluntary control. And it is plausible that, at least very often, when there is a reason to act in some way, so acting will promote or realise some value. But it seems easy to imagine cases in which there is a reason for an attitude but having that attitude will not promote or realise any value. Such observations have led some to argue that reasons for attitudes do, despite appearances, meet these conditions; they have led others to deny that there can be reasons for attitudes.¹ But the thought that these conditions must be met by all reasons seems to assume that reasons for action are paradigmatic. And we might instead question that assumption.

Our aim here is to explore and defend an alternative approach. We suggest that reasons for attitudes are fundamental, and reasons for action are both derivative and, in certain ways, idiosyncratic. More specifically, we claim that reasons for action are derivative from reasons for intention. For most of the paper we focus on this more specific claim, but we point out that if it is defensible then it lends considerable plausibility to the general claim that *all* reasons are fundamentally for attitudes.

In §2 we outline both our general and our more specific claim. In §3 we offer two arguments for the more specific claim, based on two plausible (though not uncontroversial) assumptions about reasons: they are potential premises of good reasoning, and they are capable of being responded to. In §4 we

¹ For the first reaction, with respect to reasons for belief, see Foley 1987, Ryan 2003, Steglich-Peterson 2011, Steup 2008, and Weatherson 2008. For the second, see especially Maguire 2016, 2018, but cf. also Gluer and Wiforss 2009, Papineau 1999.

consider objections. In §5, we return to the more general claim and sketch some ways in which it is significant for theorising about reasons.

2. Two Hypotheses

We will defend the following claim:

(General Hypothesis) All reasons are fundamentally reasons for attitudes.

A reason for a non-attitude is *fundamentally* a reason for an attitude if what it is to be a reason for the non-attitude is to be a reason for an attitude. As we might also say, such reasons are ‘nothing over and above’ reasons for attitudes. It is a contested question how best to understand such locutions – for instance, whether in terms of identity, constitution, grounding, or essence. We will just assume they are in good order.

According to the General Hypothesis, if there are reasons for action then they are fundamentally reasons for some attitude. How could this be? Well, reasons for action seem closely related to reasons for intention. Very often, at least, a reason for one seems to be a reason for the other. So a natural further claim for a proponent of the General Hypothesis to make is this:

(Special Hypothesis) Reasons for action are fundamentally reasons for intention.²

Are there other sorts of reason that challenge the General Hypothesis? Well, in ordinary talk we are happy to say that you have reason to be at the pub now (since it’s gone 6pm), or reason to be stronger (since you’re running a marathon soon), or reason to be able to speak French (since you’re

² Gibbard (1990: 38-9), Hedden (2015: ch.6), Portmore (2011: 63), Scanlon (1998: 21), and Smith (2013: 60) endorse claims like this. Gibbard, Portmore, Scanlon, and Smith do not defend them at length. Hedden’s view, which concerns what he calls the ‘rational ought’, depends on a kind of mentalism which we would reject as applied to reasons.

in Montreal). But being at the pub, being stronger, and being able to speak French are neither attitudes nor actions.

However, it is very natural to reinterpret these claims in terms of reasons for action or attitudes. You have a reason to be in the pub insofar as you have a reason to get there, or to want to be there. You have a reason to be stronger, or to be able to speak French, insofar as you have reasons to desire, and to bring it about, that you are stronger or able to speak French. This reinterpretation is natural because reasons are for responding to. We cannot respond to a reason to be somewhere or to have an ability except by acting and having attitudes. So it is natural to think that what underlies talk of such reasons are reasons to act and have attitudes.

This suggests that we should be cautious about taking ordinary talk of reasons at face value. This opens the door for the Special Hypothesis. Nonetheless, it is less natural to think that you have reasons to act only insofar as you have reasons to intend – indeed, things might seem to be the other way round.³ We thus take reasons for action to pose the most significant challenge to the General Hypothesis. In the rest of this paper, we will make a case for the Special Hypothesis. Assuming that what we have just said is right, the main obstacle to acceptance of the General Hypothesis will thereby have been removed. Before presenting that case, we offer some clarifications to make the Special Hypothesis more precise.

The Special Hypothesis holds that reasons to act are fundamentally reasons to intend. There are different ways this could be so, but on the version of the Hypothesis we will work with:

³ Dancy (2018: 4) says that ‘it seems just obvious’ that reasons to intend derive from reasons to act.

(Special Hypothesis, Simple Version) For p (a fact) to be a reason to ϕ (an act-type) is for p to be a reason to intend to ϕ . For p to be a reason to *not*- ϕ is for p to be a reason to intend to *not*- ϕ .⁴

Talk of 'actions' can refer to act-types or token-actions. Act-types are types of things – events or perhaps processes – which can be done intentionally (including, for our purposes, omissions). Token-actions are instances of these types. Not all act-types are things that *must* be done intentionally: I might bring my book to work unintentionally, because I left it in my bag, or press the button unintentionally while reaching for my coffee. A reason to act supports a certain act-type, such as bringing the book to work or pressing the button, rather than any token-action. Compliance with the reason requires that some token of the relevant type occur.

Intention is a type of attitude: a persisting psychological state with a content or object. It is closely related to action, in at least the following respects. First, intentions take act-types, or propositions about them, as their objects. Second, action is the *telos* of intention. To intend is to aim to act, and to execute an intention is to act intentionally. A future-directed intention to ϕ tends to persist until it becomes present-directed. A present-directed intention to ϕ manifests itself in presently trying to ϕ , which, if successful, counts as, or helps constitute, intentional ϕ ing. Some philosophers hold, further, that intentionally ϕ ing requires intending to ϕ , or at least some relevant intention.⁵ We will not assume this.⁶

⁴ Versions of the Special Hypothesis vary, for instance, on the relation between the act-type for which there is a reason and the content of the intention for which that reason is a reason.

⁵ The first of these claims is the 'Simple View', the second is the 'Single Phenomenon View'. See Bratman 1987.

⁶ We hope these remarks on action and intention are relatively uncontroversial; they fit with, but do not presuppose, the influential 'planning theory' of intention (Bratman 1987). For general discussion, see Setiya 2018 and Wilson and Shpall 2016.

It is sometimes claimed that forming an intention can itself be an action - a mental act of deciding. Similarly, it is sometimes claimed that beliefs can be formed through acts of judgment. Arguably however, decisions and judgments are not actions in the sense presently at issue, since they cannot be performed intentionally.⁷ If so, the Special Hypothesis does not apply to them. Given the intimate relations between decision and intention on the one hand, and between judgment and belief on the other, we take it that reasons for decisions and judgments can instead be treated as reasons for attitudes, and so as falling under the General Hypothesis. We will not explore this matter further here; instead we focus on reasons for act-types in the sense defined. Note that this includes some mental act-types, such as imagining a hippopotamus or calculating the square root of 441. The Special Hypothesis applies to reasons for such mental act-types, though our examples will mainly be of physical act-types.

Reasons and intentions are indexed to times, twice over. You might now have reason to go to the pub now, or now have reason to go to the pub later.⁸ Similarly, you might now intend to go to the pub now, or later. How should the Special Hypothesis accommodate this? We shall take it to say that a reason (at t_1) to (ϕ at t_2) is a reason (at t_1) to intend (at t_1) to (ϕ at t_2). We will not generally need to take care over this, though issues about time will be relevant in §4.3.

The Special Hypothesis takes reasons to act to be nothing over and above reasons to intend. It is plausible that as such, you are *criticisable* with respect to reasons to act only insofar as you are criticisable with respect to reasons to intend. Compare: you are criticisable for not being at the pub

⁷ That is, you cannot intentionally decide on a particular course of action, or judge a particular proposition true. Many authors who regard judging and deciding as acts accept this point, e.g. Hieronymi (2006), McHugh (2011).

⁸ For discussion see Kieseewetter 2017: 215ff.

only in so far as you are criticisable for not going there.⁹ We grant, for the sake of argument, that the Special Hypothesis has this implication. To illustrate, compare Jack and Jill, each of whom would benefit from ϕ ing, has no reason not to ϕ , and knows all this. Jack fails to even intend to ϕ . Jill forms and maintains the intention to ϕ , and tries her best to ϕ , but fails. Here, only Jack is rationally criticisable for his intentions. The Special Hypothesis thus implies that only Jack is rationally criticisable for his actions. This is a plausible verdict. We will call Jack irrational, silly, perverse and so on. We might call Jill clumsy or inept, but in so far as she tried her best we won't call her irrational or the like.¹⁰

As characterised, the Special Hypothesis implies not only that all reasons to act are reasons to intend but also that all reasons to intend are reasons to act. This might be disputed because of examples such as Kavka (1983)'s 'toxin puzzle', where there is a large reward for merely intending to drink an unpleasant but otherwise harmless toxin. However, the literature divides on such examples. Some hold that such considerations are not genuine reasons to intend, but rather reasons to want to intend or bring it about that you intend. Others hold that they are genuine but 'wrong-kind' reasons to intend. For simplicity, we will assume the first view here. Those who prefer the second can amend the Special Hypothesis to say that reasons to act are fundamentally *right-kind* reasons to intend.¹¹

⁹ Cf. Broome (2013). We do not deny that reasons which are derivative in weaker senses might ground criticism. For instance, you can be criticised for failing to act on an instrumental reason, even if you end up achieving the end from which this reason derives.

¹⁰ One might think that in other cases we can be rationally criticisable irrespective of our intentions. We consider this below (§4.3).

¹¹ For the first view, see, e.g. Gibbard 1990, McHugh and Way 2016, Parfit 2011, Shah 2008. For the second, see, e.g. Hieronymi 2005, Howard 2019, Schroeder 2007.

The Special Hypothesis contrasts with views which take reasons to act and reasons to intend to be independent and views which take (right-kind) reasons to intend to be, or at least to derive from, reasons to act. We take the latter to be the more common and plausible alternative. On the most popular version of this view, reasons to intend are instrumental: there's reason to intend to ϕ just when and because there's reason to ϕ and intending to ϕ promotes ϕ ing (cf. Heuer 2018, Pink 1996, Kolodny 2009). Since this seems the most natural story about how reasons to intend might derive from reasons to act, we'll take it to be the main alternative to our account. Note that this view implies that not all reasons to act are reasons to intend. In a case in which intending to ϕ does not promote ϕ ing – for instance because you're going to ϕ regardless of whether you intend to – a reason to ϕ is not a reason to intend to ϕ . We return to this below.

Another alternative to the Special Hypothesis takes reasons for *intentional action* to be prior to both reasons for action (which, recall, need not be intentional) and reasons to intend. For instance, perhaps to be a reason to ϕ is to be a reason to intentionally ϕ . For simplicity, and because we do not know of any defences of this view, we shall mostly ignore it.¹² However, our arguments for the Special Hypothesis might be developed to support this view, given certain further assumptions (see esp §3.2). It would also face some of the same objections as the Special Hypothesis, and can make some of the same replies. So the paper's arguments should be of interest to those considering such a view.

3. Arguments for the Special Hypothesis

The Special Hypothesis may require further amendments too. For example, if you think 'reason to ϕ ' implies 'can ϕ ' but 'reason to intend to ϕ ' does not, you might add the condition that the agent can perform the action. For simplicity we ignore this possibility.

¹² However, the view may appeal to defenders of the view that intentional action is prior to intention. See, e.g. Thompson 2008, McDowell 2011 and for discussion Setiya 2018.

The example of Jack and Jill provides some initial motivation for the Special Hypothesis. In this section we offer two further arguments for it.

Our arguments will make two assumptions about reasons. First, we assume that it is a central truth about reasons that they are potential premises of good reasoning. Second, we assume that reasons are subject to a *response constraint*: normative reasons must be capable of being responded to - of being our motivating reasons. These assumptions are popular and plausible.¹³ Both are motivated by the attractive idea that the point of reasons is to guide us. The way in which reasons most explicitly guide us is through reasoning: thus we should expect reasons to be potential premises of good reasoning. And a reason you cannot respond to is not one that can guide you. While neither assumption is uncontentious, we cannot defend them further here; instead we aim to show that if they are granted, they naturally lead to the Special Hypothesis.

3.1 The Response Constraint

Our first argument has two parts. We first argue that the response constraint supports the claim that any reason to ϕ is also a reason to intend to ϕ . We then show that this claim supports the Special Hypothesis.

The response constraint tells us that a reason for acting is a reason that can be acted on: if p is a (normative) reason for you to ϕ , you can ϕ for the (motivating) reason that p .¹⁴ But acting for a

¹³ For versions of the first assumption, and responses to objections, see Asarnow 2016, Hieronymi 2005, McHugh and Way 2016, Paakkunainen 2017, Setiya 2007, Schroeder 2007, Silverstein 2016, Williams 1981. For versions of the second, and responses to objections, see Kiesewetter 2017, Kolodny 2005, Lord 2018, Parfit 2011, Raz 2011, Shah 2006, Way and Whiting 2016, Williams 1981.

¹⁴ In the rest of this section, we generally allow context to disambiguate between motivating and normative reasons.

reason, we suggest, entails acting from an intention. In particular, you act for a reason only if you execute an intention held for (based on) that reason.¹⁵ To illustrate, suppose I intend to take a book to work with me, for the reason that the reading group meets this afternoon (that is, my intention is held for this reason - what I intend is not to take-the-book-for-this-reason, but simply to take the book). If I take the book by executing this intention then I take the book for the reason that the reading group meets this afternoon. But if I take the book without executing this intention, I do not. For example, if I take the book by picking up my bag which, unbeknownst to me, contains the book, then, although I take the book, and intend to do so for the reason that the reading group meets this afternoon, I do not take the book for the reason that the reading group meets this afternoon.

Thus, acting for a reason entails acting from an intention held for that reason. But in general, if you base an attitude on a consideration, you treat that consideration as a normative reason for that attitude. So in intending to ϕ for the reason that p , you treat p as a reason to intend to ϕ .

Furthermore, if it is a reason to ϕ then it is appropriate that you treat it in this way.¹⁶

Thus, if p is a reason to ϕ then p can be appropriately treated as a reason to intend to ϕ . But if it is appropriate to treat something as a reason to intend to ϕ , then it *is* a reason to intend to ϕ . Reasons are considerations that can appropriately play certain roles in our thinking and reasoning. To treat a consideration as a reason is to treat it as an appropriate occupant of such a role. If it is appropriate to treat it in this way, then it *is* an appropriate occupant of this role - that is, it is a reason. (Compare: if a precedent is appropriately treated as legally authoritative, then it *is* authoritative.)

¹⁵ Cf. Davidson 1978, Setiya 2007, Hieronymi 2011.

¹⁶ It may not be appropriate to intend to ϕ for the reason that p , if p is an outweighed reason to ϕ . However, it will still be appropriate to treat p as a reason to intend to ϕ . For instance, you might consider p in deliberation about whether to ϕ . Since practical deliberation aims at intention (see §3.3), you thereby treat p as bearing on whether to intend to ϕ . More generally, if you treat p as bearing on reasoning which aims at a response R , you treat p as bearing on R .

Let us sum up the argument thus far. Reasons for action can be acted on. You act on a reason only if you intend for that reason. In doing so you treat it as a reason for intention, and appropriately so.

But a consideration that can be appropriately treated as a reason for intention is one. So a reason to ϕ is also a reason to intend to ϕ .

If correct, this shows that all reasons to act are also reasons to intend. The Special Hypothesis offers a straightforward explanation: all reasons to act are reasons to intend because to be a reason to act is to be a reason to intend. Of course, by itself this only provides limited support for the Hypothesis, since this generalisation might be explained in other ways. However, as we noted, the view that reasons to intend are instrumental, which appears to be the main alternative to the Special Hypothesis (§2), is committed to denying, and thus cannot explain, the fact that all reasons to act are reasons to intend. As we shall discuss in more detail in §4, there are cases in which intending to ϕ does not promote ϕ ing. In these cases, a reason to ϕ is not a reason to intend to ϕ , on this view. Thus the Special Hypothesis has an important advantage over its main alternative.

Before moving on, we note one objection to this argument. We claimed that acting for a reason entails acting on an intention held for a reason. This claim is reminiscent of the 'Simple View', that intentionally ϕ ing entails intending to ϕ , and so might be thought to face similar objections. For instance, Bratman (1987: 123) suggests that foreseen but unintended consequences can be intentional: a marathon runner might intentionally wear down the soles of their shoes, despite not intending to do so, if they are aware that they are doing so. However, whether or not this is right, the case is no counterexample to our claim, since it is clear that the runner does not run down the soles of their shoes for a reason.

Bratman's central argument against the Simple View turns on his 'video-game' example. Here you are playing a game in which you simultaneously try to hit two targets – using each hand to guide a missile – although you know you cannot hit both. Bratman suggests that if you hit one of the targets – target 1 – you do so intentionally, although you did not intend to hit target 1. Here again, we

suggest, it is dubious that you hit target 1 – as opposed to hitting one of the targets – for a reason. But it is also unclear that you don't intend to hit target 1. As others have observed, you are guided by a motivational state with the functional role of intention. We might thus take the case as one in which it is rational to have inconsistent intentions (McCann 1991; Kolodny 2009). Either way then, the video-game example is not a compelling case of acting for a reason without acting on an intention held for a reason.¹⁷

3.2 Reasons and Reasoning

Our second argument aims to provide support for the Special Hypothesis through attention to the way reasons feature in reasoning.

In theoretical reasoning, you aim to settle on a view of what's true – to form a belief. But you do this by considering the question of what's true – or, more specifically, of whether, say, it will rain. Thus you consider evidence bearing on this question – e.g. that clouds are gathering. If, on the basis of this evidence, you answer the question affirmatively, you thereby believe it will rain. But you don't need to think about this belief – you can just think about the prospects of rain.¹⁸

¹⁷ Hornsby (1993) and Heuer (2014) offer putative cases of acting for reasons without acting from an intention. Hornsby focuses on 'emergency cases'. If a snowball is about to hit you, she suggests, you might catch it for a reason (that it is about to hit you) without intending to do so. However, forming an intention need not take long, or precede the start of action. If catching the ball is not a mere reflex – if you meant to do it – then it does seem that you must have intended to do it (cf. Heuer 2018). Other putative cases involve intentions that would be in some way counter-productive. Since such cases might also be thought counter-examples to the Special Hypothesis, we discuss them later (§4).

¹⁸ You can also revise an attitude as a result of higher-order reasoning about it, e.g. by considering whether your evidence is sufficient to justify belief. But in doing so you most directly revise your higher-order attitudes. It's a further step to revising your first-order attitude.

In practical reasoning, you aim to settle on a course of action – to form an intention. But you do this by considering the question of what to do – or, more specifically, of whether, say, to go to the pub. Thus you consider factors bearing on this question – e.g. that your friends are at the pub. If, on the basis of such factors, you answer the question affirmatively, you thereby intend to go to the pub. But you don't need to think about this intention – you can just think about the pros and cons of going to the pub.¹⁹

In both theoretical and practical reasoning, then, there is a distinction between a response to which the reasoning leads, and the object of that response. In the theoretical case, the response is a belief and its object is a proposition. In the practical case, the response is an intention and its object is an act-type. Thus, as far as their role in reasoning goes, practical reasons seem to stand to intentions, rather than to act-types, as theoretical reasons stand to beliefs; they stand to act-types as theoretical reasons stand, not to beliefs, but to propositions. In the theoretical case, it is clear that what reasons support is fundamentally beliefs, not propositions. If we take their role in reasoning to be an important aspect of the nature of reasons, then, we should regard practical reasons as fundamentally supporting intentions rather than act-types. In doing so we get an attractive, unified picture of how (fundamental) reasons feature in reasoning: a reason for a response is a premise of good reasoning that concludes in that response, reasoning which is about the object of the response. By contrast, if we regard practical reasons as fundamentally supporting act-types, then we find deep differences between practical and theoretical reasons in respect of the way they relate, in reasoning, to the responses they support. Such differences seem hard to reconcile with the idea that their role in reasoning is an important aspect of the nature of reasons.

¹⁹ In characterising practical reasoning this way, we do not deny that there is such a thing as reasoning about what you ought, or have reason to do. We class this as theoretical reasoning, although it can – and should but does not always – inform practical reasoning (cf. Broome 2013: 250; Harman 1986: 77). Nor do we deny that in practical reasoning you might also aim to act – see below (this section).

Our argument here might seem to ignore the Aristotelian thesis that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action.²⁰ However, the central alternative to the Special Hypothesis is that practical reasons fundamentally support act-types – i.e. types of events or processes that can but need not be intentional. But if the Aristotelian thesis is right, *intentional* actions can be conclusions of practical reasoning. Mere actions cannot be conclusions of practical reasoning by anyone’s lights. Irrespective of the Aristotelian thesis then, we can conclude that practical reasons are not fundamentally reasons for mere actions, and thus that the Special Hypothesis should be preferred to its central alternative.²¹

4. Objections and Replies

We have made a prima facie case for the Special Hypothesis. We now turn to considering some objections. First, we will consider the objection that the Special Hypothesis wrongly puts the focus of our practical lives on intention rather than action (§4.1). Second, we will address some putative counterexamples: cases where it might seem plausible to attribute a reason for action but not a reason for intention (§4.2). Third, we will consider an objection to what we earlier granted is an implication of the Special Hypothesis: that rational criticisability for action depends on rational criticisability for intention. In some cases, it might seem, your actions make you rationally criticisable regardless of your intentions (§4.3).

4.1 The Wrong Focus?

²⁰ See Fernandez 2016, Dancy 2018, Tenenbaum 2007 and Paul 2013 for discussion.

²¹ We thus acknowledge that our argument here might be used to support the view that practical reasons are fundamentally for intentional actions. But this would require a defence of the Aristotelian thesis.

Much of our ordinary practical deliberation, our talk about practical reasons, and our practices of holding each other responsible, focuses on actions rather than intentions. The Special Hypothesis might seem incompatible with this fact. In taking reasons to act to hold in virtue of reasons to intend, it might seem to give practical reasons the wrong focus, or to suggest that what ultimately matters is what we intend rather than what we do.

However, this concern is misguided. First, reasons for intention are provided by features of actions – for instance, what gives me a reason to intend to go the pub is that going to the pub allows me to see my friends. It is thus not surprising that these features should be the focus of attention in practical deliberation, just as evidence for propositions, rather than beliefs as such, is the focus of ordinary theoretical deliberation. Second, practical deliberation in its basic form is framed by the question of what to *do*, rather than what to intend, just as theoretical deliberation is framed by the question of what is the case, rather than what to believe. We form intentions in deliberation by answering the question of what to do, just as we form beliefs in deliberation by answering the question of what's true. Third, the Special Hypothesis does not entail that what we intend *matters* more than how we act. It is a claim about what's metaphysically fundamental, not about what's more important, or what we have more reason to care about. It might be that what matters most is how we act, even though reasons to act derive from reasons to intend, and even though we are criticisable for our actions only in so far as we are criticisable for our intentions.

4.2 Reasons to Act Without Reasons to Intend?

Some philosophers hold that there are reasons to act that are not reasons to intend. We will discuss three common kinds of examples.

(i) *Pointless Intentions*

Heuer (2018) suggests that, if you'll do something regardless of whether you intend to do it, then you can have reasons to do it but no reasons to intend it. Her examples include reasons not to kill and reasons not to go into space without a spacesuit. The thought seems to be that, since you're already going to do the thing, there's no point in forming the intention. Examples need not be limited to omissions: for instance, you might have reason to exercise today but since you will get exercise by walking to work, you need not intend to exercise.²²

But this isn't convincing. Heuer's claim here must be that you have *no* reason for such intentions. But suppose you deliberate about whether to kill someone, whether to go into space without a spacesuit, or whether to exercise today. Clearly, there are relevant considerations that might rationally lead you to intend not to kill anyone, not to go into space without a spacesuit, and to exercise. You would be making no mistake in basing such intentions on these considerations. In doing so, you would be treating them as reasons for so intending. But, again, something that can be appropriately treated as a reason is one. So, even if you're not required to have these intentions, it's not true that you lack reasons for them.

Any impression to the contrary may be due to a tacit assumption that reasons for intentions are instrumental from reasons to act. But as we explained in §2, this is a substantive view, and it is one which the foregoing considerations count against. In deliberation about whether to ϕ , it can be fine to base an intention to ϕ on the worthwhile features of ϕ ing, even if intending does not make it more likely that you will ϕ , because you're going to ϕ anyway.

²² Heuer (2018) suggests that habitual actions might also be examples. However, as she allows, it is less clear that action from habit is done without intention. We therefore focus on the clearer examples. For discussion of habitual action see Owens 2017. We take the points in this section to also answer further putative counter-examples that could be drawn from Heuer's discussions, including cases in which you have a reason to do something but it doesn't matter whether you do it intentionally (2018: 877), and cases where a complex action would be impeded by intending each part of it (2014: 306).

Another potential source of confusion might be a failure to distinguish reasons for intending to ϕ from reasons for deliberating about whether to ϕ . You may have no reason to deliberate about, say, whether to kill. Even if so, it doesn't follow that you have no reason to intend not to kill. It's a general feature of reasons for attitudes that you can have them even though you have no reason to deliberate. Deliberation demands time and resources that you should invest carefully, by directing them to important questions that can't be left to quick and automatic cognition. You have reasons bearing on many questions that do not call for this investment.

Heuer's argument thus fails. But her examples also form the basis for a different objection to the Special Hypothesis. Even if it is accepted that there are reasons to intend not to kill and not to go into space without a spacesuit, there still seems a difference in the overall normative status of these intentions and the corresponding omissions. You *ought* not go into space without a spacesuit and you *ought* not kill. But it is okay not to intend these things. And since what you ought to do is, very plausibly, determined by reasons, it follows that there must be reasons to act which don't derive from reasons to intend – for otherwise, the overall status of actions and the corresponding intentions could not come apart.

However, this argument is too quick. If you ought to ϕ but need not intend to ϕ , this need not be because there are reasons to ϕ which are not reasons to intend to ϕ . Indeed, on the face of it, this is not what's going on in these cases. The factors which seem to make it okay not to intend not to kill, and not to intend not to go into space without a spacesuit, are that forming these intentions may require deliberation or conscious attention. This is a use of valuable cognitive resources, which is here a cost that is not compensated for by the need to form an intention. By contrast, the actions of not killing, and not going into space without a spacesuit, do not require deliberation or conscious attention. These factors – the costs of deliberation and attention – are not plausibly understood as reasons to ϕ which are not reasons to intend to ϕ . For instance, that forming an intention not to kill would be costly is not a reason not to kill.

How should we understand these factors and the role they play in explaining the overall status of action and intention? One possibility is that they are reasons against intending to ϕ which are not reasons against ϕ -ing. The Special Hypothesis is compatible with the existence of such reasons, since it takes reasons for and against acting to be reasons *for* intending (to act or not to act). However, an appeal to such reasons might seem in tension with the way we have argued for the Special Hypothesis.²³ Fortunately, there are other possibilities. Perhaps such factors affect the overall status of intention indirectly, by providing reasons to form no intention on the matter. Or perhaps it remains true in these cases that you ought to intend, but it's also true that you ought not deliberate, and will not intend unless you deliberate. If so, you may not be criticisable, even though you lack an intention you ought to have.

Each of these suggestions offers a way to explain seeming differences between the overall statuses of actions and intentions without appealing to reasons for action which are not reasons for intention. Properly assessing them would require an account of how considerations determine what you ought to do and intend, something we cannot provide here. For present purposes the point is just that it is only on a non-mandatory, and indeed implausible, treatment of the target cases that they represent counterexamples to the Special Hypothesis.

(ii) *Self-Undermining Intentions*

Sometimes an intention to act can be self-undermining, in the sense that acting on that intention is incompatible with doing what it is an intention to do. For example, if you intend to act modestly

²³ In particular, our second argument takes reasons to be potential premises of reasoning, and practical reasoning to be reasoning about what to do (§3.2). It is not clear how reasons against intention which are not reasons against acting could feature in such reasoning. For relevant discussion, see Schroeder (2012), Hieronymi (2013), and Shah and Silverstein (2013).

then you will fail, since acting modestly is incompatible with acting on such a self-regarding intention. Similarly, acting spontaneously seems incompatible with acting on an intention to be spontaneous. Heuer (2018) suggests that in these cases too, you can have reason to act but no reasons to intend to act.²⁴

But here we need to be careful about exactly what reasons it's plausible to attribute to agents. Take modesty. You can have a reason to do what would in fact be modest in a particular situation - to share credit for some achievement, say. And in doing so you might manifest the virtue of modesty. But the reason to act that way will not be that doing so is modest. It will be, for example, that others contributed to the achievement and should get due credit. Nor will this, or any other consideration, be a reason for doing what's modest as such. It will just be a reason for whatever the act-type is, e.g. sharing credit. And it will also be a reason for intending this act-type. So there are no plausible reasons here that constitute counterexamples to the Hypothesis.

This isn't to deny that there are modesty-related reasons. For instance, you can have reasons to want to be modest, and to cultivate your modesty. But the intention to cultivate your modesty isn't self-undermining.

What about spontaneity? We can say similar things. A 'reason to do something spontaneous' might be a reason to choose certain sorts of options in your situation. Or it might be a reason to choose without deliberating at length. There are also reasons to desire and cultivate spontaneity. None of these responses involve self-undermining intentions. There is thus no obvious need to posit reasons that would be counterexamples to the Special Hypothesis (cf. Smith 2013: 62-3).

²⁴ There are also cases where intending to act undermines the putative *reason* to act – as when you will get a reward for falling over, but only if you do so unintentionally. We would treat such cases in the same way, so do not discuss them separately.

We take this way of treating putative reasons for modesty and spontaneity to be plausible on its face. Note that it is also supported by the response constraint: the condition that reasons must be such that they can be responded to (§3.1). If the intention to ϕ would be self-undermining, a reason to ϕ cannot be responded to.^{25, 26}

4.3 Criticisability

Reasons matter. When they are conclusive, you are ordinarily criticisable for failing to comply with them. As noted in §2, the Special Hypothesis seems to imply that you are rationally criticisable for your actions only insofar as you can be rationally criticised for your intentions. We suggested that this implication is plausible.

This might be doubted. Suppose that you promise to feed your neighbour's cat. If all else is equal, this gives you conclusive reason to feed your neighbour's cat. And so, if all else is equal, you will be criticisable if you fail to feed your neighbour's cat. This might seem to be so regardless of your intentions. It's not enough just to intend to feed the cat: you also have to execute this intention. Thus the Special Hypothesis does not capture the significance of reasons to act.

²⁵ For further relevant discussion see Paakkunainen 2017.

²⁶ Pink (1996) offers a different kind of counter-example to the Special Hypothesis. He argues that *the fact that you now intend to ϕ at a later time t* can itself generate reasons to ϕ at t , since it makes it likely that between now and t you will stake things on your ϕ ing at t (e.g. by making plans whose success depends on your ϕ ing at t , and inviting others to do so. Cf. Kolodny 2009). Yet the mere fact that you have this intention can't give you a reason to have it. While we lack the space to discuss this in detail, we suggest that the fact, if it is one, that things will be staked on your ϕ ing at t , is a reason both for ϕ ing and for intending to ϕ . That seems plausible: if failing to ϕ threatens disaster, then you have a reason to intend to ϕ . However, if you are deliberating about whether to ϕ then you don't yet have the settled intention to ϕ , so no reasons of the sort Pink describes are generated.

This objection requires that there are cases in which you intend as you have conclusive reason to intend, fail to act as you have conclusive reason to act, and thereby merit criticism. In the remainder of this section, we will argue that it is unclear that there are such cases. We will do so by considering different ways in which you might fail to feed your neighbour's cat, despite intending to do so.

Suppose that you now intend to feed the cat but then later change your mind, or forget, and so do not feed the cat. You might then be criticisable for failing to feed the cat, despite having intended to do it. But the Special Hypothesis can explain this. As noted (§2), reasons are indexed to times, which may be earlier than the time of the response that is called for. You might now have reason to feed the cat later, or you might now have reason to feed the cat now. But you merit criticism for failing to do what you have reason to do only once the time for the response has come. If you have conclusive reason to feed the cat later, then you do not merit criticism just because you are not yet feeding the cat. You merit criticism only if you have conclusive reason to feed the cat now. But in the case at issue, you lack the right intention at the time you are meant to be feeding the cat. Thus the Special Hypothesis can explain why you are criticisable.

This shows that any problematic cases for the Special Hypothesis must be cases in which you fail to act on an intention to act at that very time.²⁷ But there might seem to be such cases. You might intend to feed the cat at midnight but fail to do so because you are not aware that it is midnight. Or you might intend to feed the cat at midnight and try to do so but fail – perhaps something prevented you, or perhaps you needed a bit of luck to succeed, which was not forthcoming.

To address such cases, we need the notion of having control over whether you ϕ . Roughly, where ϕ ing is an act-type, you have control over whether you ϕ if trying to ϕ (or not to do so) will ensure that you ϕ (or don't ϕ). You lack control over whether you ϕ if this is not so. If you lack control over

²⁷ Note that such an intention need not be a present-directed intention i.e. an intention directed at the present, conceptualised as such.

whether you ϕ then it's not up to you whether you ϕ . This might be because you can't ϕ at all, or can't but ϕ . More interestingly, it might be because, although you can ϕ , trying to ϕ will not ensure that you do so – you might need a bit of luck.²⁸

Consider now the case in which you intend to feed the cat and try to do so but fail. In this case, feeding the cat was not under your control. But, ordinarily, if you lack control over whether you do something, you cannot be rationally criticised for failing to do it (though you might be criticised for failing to try). The fact that it was not up to you whether to feed the cat excuses you for failing to do so, so long as you tried your best.

Of course, a lack of control does not always excuse. In particular, if you are responsible for the lack of control – perhaps because you are drunk, or failed to take earlier opportunities to ensure that feeding the cat would later be under your control – then you may still be criticisable. But this is an example of the familiar phenomenon whereby current criticisability can be traced to earlier mistakes – as when the drunken driver is criticisable for hitting the pedestrian, not because he could have done anything about it at the time, but because he decided to drive when drunk.²⁹ It is plausible that criticisability of this sort requires the agent to have had erroneous intentions at the earlier time.

The phenomenon of tracing shows the need for an important clarification of our account. While rational criticisability for failing to ϕ must derive from rational criticisability for (lacking) some

²⁸ For trying to ϕ to ensure that you ϕ is not for it to be necessary that, if you try to ϕ , you ϕ . A weaker relation is required - perhaps that in nearby worlds you ϕ if you try to ϕ . Note also that by 'trying' we mean 'trying appropriately'. This is because ϕ -ing is not necessarily out of your control if you might fail to ϕ despite a weak attempt, or because you try 'too hard', or in the wrong way. We take it that failed attempts of this sort will reflect potentially criticisable features of underlying attitudes (cf. the discussion of tracing in the main text). It will, of course, be a difficult matter to specify precisely the required notion of trying. For relevant discussion, see, e.g. Marušič 2015: chs.1, 6; Portmore 2019: ch. 3.

²⁹ E.g. Fischer and Tognazinni 2009.

intention, it need not be the intention to ϕ . It may derive from criticisability for lacking an intention to ψ , where ψ ing would have facilitated ϕ ing. We do not take this to be a problem for the Special Hypothesis, but rather a plausible upshot that emerges when we combine it with considerations about tracing.³⁰

What about a case in which you fail to act because of ignorance – e.g. of what the time is, or of which cat is your neighbour's? Well, if you are unaware of your ignorance or you lack control over whether you correct it, then you also lack control over whether you feed the cat. You might luckily manage to do it, but trying doesn't ensure that you will. Again then, if you fail to feed the cat, you will not merit criticism, unless you are responsible for your lack of control.

If, on the other hand, you are aware of your ignorance and it is under your control whether to correct it, then, at least if you are rational, you will correct your ignorance, and try to feed the cat. If you don't, that will be because there is an intention that you lack, e.g. to correct your ignorance, and your criticisability for failing to feed the cat will be traceable to it.

The qualification, 'if you are rational', suggests that there might be a further kind of case. Might you not intend to feed the cat at midnight, know that it's midnight, have it under your control whether to feed the cat, and yet fail to do so because you are irrational - perhaps, for instance, you are weak-willed, or lazy, or lose your nerve?

This worry can be reinforced with a different example. Suppose you have conclusive reason to get out of bed now – you're already running late. Still, even if you intend to get out of bed you might not. And not because of ignorance or a lack of control – rather, you just fail to get yourself to do

³⁰ We take these points to help with cases where an agent is rationally criticisable for an unintended outcome brought about through negligence or recklessness. Although in such cases the agent does not intend the bad outcome, they will be criticisable only if their intentions are criticisable in some respect.

what you intend. This might seem irrational – and thus criticisable – but nonetheless possible, indeed common.

We think that paying attention to time helps here too. An intention ‘to get out of bed’ could either be an intention to get out of bed at a later (though perhaps imminent) time, or an intention to be getting out of bed right now. As we have seen, cases in which you have an intention to act at a later time are not problematic. You can only be criticised for failing to act on a reason to act once the time for action has come.

But couldn’t you intend to be getting out of bed now, and yet not be getting out of bed now? We think it is hard to make sense of this possibility, assuming that getting out of bed is under your control. As suggested earlier (§2), it’s plausible that there is a necessary connection between present-directed intention and trying: if you’re not now trying to ϕ then you don’t intend to be ϕ ing, even if you think you do, and even if you did until a moment ago.³¹ But if it’s in your control to move now, and you try to move, you will move. In support of this, note that the conventional expression of a present-directed intention to ϕ is ‘I’m ϕ ing’. If you are aware you are not moving, and you are not even trying to move, you cannot sincerely say ‘I’m getting out of bed’.

We conclude that there are no clear cases in which you intend as you have conclusive reason to intend (at the appropriate time), fail to act as you have conclusive reason to act, and are thereby criticisable. Thus we have not seen a compelling case that the Special Hypothesis cannot explain the significance of reasons for action. Rather, it seems that in all cases in which you are rationally

³¹ Cf. e.g. Bratman 1987: 16, Broome 2013: 151-2, O’Shaughnessy 1973: 380-3, McDowell 2011: 3. Asarnow (2019) takes the phenomenon of not getting out of bed to be a counterexample to claims of this sort. While we agree with Asarnow that there is a familiar experience of, as he puts it, ‘irrationally dawdling in bed’, we think that it is not obvious that it involves a failure to act on an intention to be getting out of bed, rather than a failure to act on a series of intentions to get out of bed imminently. Unfortunately we lack the space to engage with Asarnow’s discussion in more detail.

criticisable for failing to act, there is also a problem with your intentions. The Special Hypothesis can thus maintain that this explains why you are criticisable.

5. Upshots

We have been defending the Special Hypothesis, the claim that reasons for action are fundamentally reasons for intention. After some discussion of what the claim amounts to, we presented two arguments for it and responded to several objections. This also amounts to a case for the General Hypothesis, that all reasons are fundamentally reasons for attitudes. As we began by noting, this Hypothesis runs contrary to much theorising about reasons. The Hypothesis thus has upshots for a range of issues. In closing, we indicate some of these.

Some theorists hold that reasons are always grounded in some value possessed or promoted by the responses they support.³² This claim has prima facie plausibility when applied to reasons for action. When you have a reason to go to the pub or donate to charity, that is plausibly because of some good that is likely to come of it. The claim is less plausible when applied to reasons for attitudes: it seems you have reasons to believe truths and fear dangers even when no good will come of it. However, if the Special Hypothesis is correct, then the claim even gets reasons for action importantly wrong. According to the Special Hypothesis, reasons for action are fundamentally reasons for intention. And reasons for intention are not based in the value of intending. They might often be based in the value of the action intended, but even then the reasons for intending needn't be conditional on the intention's promoting this value. As we saw with the case of intending not to enter space without a spacesuit, you can have reasons to intend even when intending does not promote doing what you intend, and so need not itself be of value. Thus, even reasons for action are not grounded in the value of the responses they fundamentally support.

³² E.g. Maguire 2016, Finlay 2014, Wedgwood 2017.

This illustrates how theorising about reasons can be shaped by the sorts of examples we start from. If we start from action as the paradigm case, the view that reasons are grounded in value will seem plausible. However, when we consider reasons for attitudes, it seems more natural to explain them in terms of their role in good reasoning or the fittingness conditions of attitudes (cf. Hieronymi 2005, Howard 2019, McHugh and Way 2016, Setiya 2007, Thomson 2008). If the General Hypothesis is correct, accounts of the latter sort have better prospects for capturing the fundamental nature of reasons.

Another upshot concerns the connections between reasons and control. When we focus on actions, we seem to find connections between reasons and *voluntary* control. You can have reasons to go to the pub but not to, say, win the lottery, because only the former is under your voluntary control. And it is plausible that you are rationally criticisable for not going to the pub only in so far as doing so was under your voluntary control. However, it is not a general feature of reason-governed responses that they are under voluntary control: belief is not under voluntary control, nor is, for instance, desire, admiration or fear. Nor, importantly, is intention. We don't form and revise intentions by way of intentions to do so. Rather, like other reason-governed attitudes, intention is under a more fundamental, non-voluntary form of control, in which we directly form and revise our attitudes in response to reasons (Hieronymi 2006, McHugh 2017). If the General Hypothesis is correct, this suggests that it is this non-voluntary *attitudinal* control that is most fundamentally relevant to reasons and rational criticisability. Voluntary control matters for action because it is by executing intentions, and thus exercising voluntary control, that we respond to reasons for actions. But that is an idiosyncratic case, not a paradigmatic one.

More broadly, the General Hypothesis highlights the fundamental role of attitudes in our constitution as rational, responsible, world-engaged agents. Attitudes constitute our orientation towards the world, in which we can get things right or wrong, be justified or not. Our actions change

the world in more or less beneficial ways - but it's only in so far as they express or embody our orientation towards the world that they fall within the realm of reason and normativity.³³

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